ABSTRACT

CHAMPAGNE, MATTHEW JAMES: Sounding Gay with a Twang?: Negotiating Gay and Southern Identities Vocalically. (Under the direction of Dr. Robin Dodsworth)

This study investigates linguistic variation across social contexts by two gay men living in North Carolina. One is a lifelong resident of the island of Ocracoke, and the other is a politician who moved to Raleigh during early adulthood. Three Ocracoke recordings come from the Sociolinguistic Archive and Analysis Project, or SLAAP archives (Kendall 2007), and five Raleigh recordings were compiled from various media platforms. Acoustic measures for /ae/, /ay/, /eh/, /ey/, /ih/, /iy/, /ow/, and /uw/ at 25% and 75% through the respective vowels were extracted and analyzed. A mixed-methods approach utilizing mixed-effects linear regression models, discourse analysis, and ethnographic analysis indicate both men produce context-based variation, supporting the idea that gay men may use context-based, advanced features of the local dialect in-line with previous research on this matter (Podesva 2011).

In addition to finding context-based variation produced by these men, this work also posits the necessity of not only acknowledging the local-social meanings of a linguistic variant, but also taking into consideration what it means to be Queer within a given social-local space, and the relationship the Queer speaker has with their own Queerness. Building on ideas put forth by Schilling-Estes (1998), Dodsworth (2008), Podesva (2011), Podesva and Van Hofwegen (2016), and Calder (2019), I argue for the use of a “Personal, Queer, Local-Social Model” (PQLSM) when examining linguistic variation of regional variables by Queer individuals. Through the PQLSM, it is revealed that the Ocracoke speaker uses advanced /ay/-backing to acknowledge his own Queerness, crafting an “Actual Ocracoke” persona, and that the Raleigh speaker uses a less-southern /ey/ variant to construct a “new Raleigh Realness” persona.